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## Colonel N. W. Mills of the Second Iowa Infantry

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## COLONEL N. W. MILLS OF THE SECOND IOWA INFANTRY

By Hon. F. M. MILLS

Colonel Noah W. Mills was born June 21, 1834, in Montgomery County, Indiana. His father was Hon. Dan Mills who removed to Crawfordsville where he practiced law, but afterward removed to northwestern Indiana where he served a term as judge of his district, later removing to Des Moines, and later to Jefferson. From that judicial district he was elected to the first term of the Iowa State Board of Education, which passed the school laws which, in the main, are still the laws in force.

Colonel Mills was partly educated at Wabash College. He learned the printing business, but was afterward connected with a railway engineering corps, and then became a railway messenger of the Adams Express Company. On his railway trips he carried his law books with him and studied them, and was later admitted to the bar, having also served as deputy county clerk.

In 1856 he was married to a daughter of Judge P. A. Hackleman of Indiana, afterward General Hackleman, who commanded the brigade composed of the Second and several other Iowa regiments at the Battle of Corinth, where he, as well as my brother, was killed.

Soon after his marriage he removed to Des Moines to practice law, but the town was full of young lawyers who flocked to Des Moines on the location of the capital and the establishment of a land office there, so it was decided to establish a book and job printing office in connection with his brother, which grew into a large and successful publishing house.

During the presidential campaign of 1860 he was captain of the Wide-awakes, and on the breaking out of the war he enlisted with the military company which had been formed in Des Moines, was appointed second lieutenant of Company D, Second Iowa Infantry, and at the organization at the rendezvous at Keokuk was promoted to captain. He saw some service in Missouri where



COLONEL N. W. MILLS

Second Iowa Infantry

(From the steel engraving in "Iowa Colonels," by Captain A. A. Stuart, 1865)

he was in charge of a camp, and then returned to the regiment and was in the front at the Battle of Fort Donelson where he gained much credit, and was promoted to major. At the Battle of Shiloh his coat sleeve was shot away and he had a slight wound in the face. He was in the hottest part of the fight in the Hornet's Nest where half of the brigade was taken prisoner, and General Tuttle gave him the credit of saving the rest of the regiment by sending him word that the Rebels were flanking them. He was next promoted to lieutenant-colonel. Early in the Battle of Corinth, on the first day, both General Hackleman and Colonel Baker were killed and the command of the Second Regiment devolved on him, and he fought the battle through to the last minute of the second day's fight, when he was shot in the foot while leading the last charge on Van Dorn. He had taken the colors on his horse and while pressing the enemy was shot. His wound resulted in lockjaw and he died within the week. Governor Kirkwood had commissioned him colonel of the regiment but the commission had not reached him when he died.

His remains were brought home and were buried with the full honors of war, Hon. John A. Kasson delivering the oration which, by request of the citizens, was published in the *Register*, and is published with this sketch. Colonel Mills was a good speaker, a fine writer, something of a poet, and would have made his mark in affairs if he had lived. He was tall, well built, and of fine presence. He was greatly loved by his friends and his men. Nearly every one of his employees went to the war with him.

#### ADDRESS OF HON. JOHN A. KASSON

(Funeral address delivered at Des Moines on October 20, 1862, in honor of Lieutenant-Colonel Mills of the Second Iowa Infantry, killed in the Battle of Corinth.)

The country, and the family, have a common, and a double mourning today.<sup>1</sup> One mourns the loss of a brave general and a gallant colonel. The other at the same time mourns the father mature in years, and the young husband. The last double grief is too deep, too sacred, for me to touch. I leave this to the consolations of religion. Let me rather speak the voice of the citizens.

The words pronounced at a soldier's burial should be few. He loved

<sup>1</sup>General Hackleman, of Indiana, and Lieutenant-Colonel Mills, who was General Hackleman's son-in-law.



his country, he fought for her, he died for her. These tell the history of each brave soul who has gone from among us, and has fallen by the cruel hands of traitors. Some of these now sleep their last sleep near the homes which sent them forth, others have gone to rest beneath a distant soil, which our enemies would, if possible, make a foreign soil. They rejoice as we bury the gallant sons of the North in the distant South, and indulge hopes therefrom of success. Fools! not to see that the heart goes where the treasure is, and that the soil so consecrated shall never, never, become alien to us, so long as enough of that sacred dust remains to answer the call of the Archangel's trumpet. No! as the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church, so is the blood of the patriot the fountain of new vigor and valor. For each one who falls, two rise up, and offer to avenge the country that lost him. Wherever loyal dust is found, on the plains of Texas, the delta of the Mississippi, in the everglades of Florida, the mountains of Tennessee, or the sands of the Carolinas, there is national soil, and it belongs to the common posterity of our fathers, and to the flag which lawfully waved over it.

It has pleased God to ordain that great blessings should be won by nations at great cost. The enormous strides of advancing civilization in Europe for a hundred years past have been made along a dark and bloody road. France, first divided by civil war, then united by a foreign war, threw off the shackles of an infamous despotism into a sea of blood; and then threw off the worse tyranny of anarchy into another red sea; and thereafter reddened all the plains of Europe with her blood, while she consolidated her institutions in the light of a new progress and comparative liberty. England, from the time her blood was expended for Magna Charta to the final overthrow of royal tyranny and the foundation of her present popular system, has marked nearly every step of her progress with blood. Our own national history discloses the same law of social advancement. Our Revolution, our subsequent emancipation from British dictation, both came to us by great expenditure of blood and treasure.

But now, again, a great, vital, terrific struggle is upon our generation. Our own government is to be established at vast cost of blood and treasure. In the spring of last year, while our ploughmen were inviting the generous earth to feed the world again with her bounties, while unwonted evidences of general prosperity were manifested throughout our land, while constitution and laws remained unchanged, the sound of treacherous cannon was echoed from the southeast. A long formed, deeply laid, and most terrible conspiracy lifted its threatening front and directed its bloodshot eyes, not merely at our national peace, but at our national life also. The monstrous offspring of mad ambition and swollen pride, and nursed by perjury, its serpentine trail was early discovered among the late administrators and sworn defenders of the government. The loyal soldiers of our standing army had been moved far away into the wilderness. The effective navy was floating idly in

distant seas, requiring long months for its recall. Our arms and ammunition had been sent to supply Southern armories and Southern fortifications. The treacherous poison was infused into the very men whose experience seemed necessary to the proper working of the War and Navy departments. Distrusted, and self-convicted, they deserted the loyal ship of state. Some who remained tarried only to acquire secrets which they afterward betrayed. The conspirators, in order to induce further desertions, offered the bribe, to military and naval officers, of equal rank and pay in their iniquitous service. The letter of one officer then in our service was shown to me, in which he stated to his ignoble fellow conspirator that he intended to remain a little longer in the national service, as resignations were frequent, promotions rapid, and he would soon be promoted himself, when he would quit the service and enter the conspiracy with higher rank. This profound depth of infamy was hardly rivaled even by a Benedict Arnold, or a Twiggs.<sup>2</sup> Was a vessel of war in course of construction, a conspiring engineer would break or disarrange her machinery. Was a ship to be dispatched seaward, who was safe enough in his loyalty to command her? Was an expedition of the military determined, who was competent, and at the same time true enough, to conduct it? The very children of the nation, adopted in childhood, fed and clothed by the government, educated by the country at her military and naval schools, and provided for through life, even these proved to be vipers, carried in the bosom of the Union only to sting the breast that had warmed them into life. Never since time began was a beneficent government so sorely pressed. The national sun rose gloomily each successive morning, only to sink in deeper gloom at night. The open, beaming face of loyalty was almost disguised with shame. The unholy eye of Rebellion was luridly gleaming with expected triumph. Envious tyrants abroad smiled their grim approbation of treason, and pronounced the people incapable of maintaining their own government.

While these impending clouds overhung the national horizon, a flash like Heaven's luminous thunderbolt rent them in twain, and illuminated the patriot's heart with hope. It was the President's call of the people to arms. As the returning tide in one of the northeastern bays of our coast comes in to flood, roaring and rushing, to the terror of mariners, sweeping all save the immovable rocks in its mighty course, so came the loyal people of the invincible North in their rush to arms—to the defense of the national life, and national liberty.

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<sup>2</sup>David E. Twiggs was born in Richmond County, Georgia, in 1790. He served in the United States Army in the War of 1812, and in the Black Hawk War. He remained in the army and in the Mexican War and became a brevet brigadier-general. After peace was declared he was given command of the Department of the West with headquarters in St. Louis, but in 1837 he took charge of the Department of Texas with office at San Antonio. In 1861 he ranked next to General Scott, the senior officer of the army, but he resigned and was made a major-general of the Confederate Army and was its ranking general. He served at New Orleans for a time but soon retired because of age. (See *National Cyc. Am. Biog.*, Vol. IV, p. 102.)



And thou, dear old friend, now lying so cold and rigid before me, then foremost among them! Brave heart, throbbing then with quick pulsations of patriotic blood, alas, too silent now! Would it had pleased God to spare you longer, to witness the final triumph of your country's arms, and the restoration of national concord! Then, like Wolfe on the plains of Quebec, your voice would have been heard saying "I die happy."

No more upright, or purer, soul joined that army. He was only twenty-six years of age. He had read for the profession of law in Indiana, and thence he came to this city where his desire for that profession was abandoned in the more quiet pursuits of business. Few persons knew how quietly and steadily he followed literary studies. Fond of reading and composing in his leisure hours, he cultivated tastes that improved and honored him. His character was so unpretending, his life so void of worldly ambition, that the public had remained ignorant of his essential worth and vigorous patriotism. After a brief space given to reflection, he responded to the bugle note sounded by the commander-in-chief with the offer of his labor and his life for the salvation of his government. He was made second lieutenant of the first company which this county sent forth to the war. He was enrolled with the Second Iowa Infantry—the first in Iowa which enlisted for the war. From that time to his last hour he bore a gallant and distinguished part in all the victories of that glorious battalion. Rising rapidly grade by grade, gaining each bar and both oak leaves by merit, on the day of his last battle he found himself in command of one of the most distinguished regiments in the United States service, and entitled to place the silver eagle on his shoulders. Cool, collected, fearless in the rage of battle, unseduced by pleasure, unshaken by danger, untterrified in the death storm, he was a model officer, a Bayard among the volunteers. As I recall his manly form, his serene countenance, his Christian eye, I can understand why no Rebel bullet could do more than rend his garments, and why it should be left to a chance ball to tear his foot, and ultimately destroy his life. As a traitor looked into his kindly face, he reproached himself as a murderer at the thought of robbing mankind of such a model of upright manhood. In the brilliant and daring assault by his regiment at Donelson, which won us the first great victory of the war, he escaped almost unscathed. In the terrible scenes at Shiloh his escape was equally miraculous. In the Battle of Corinth he seemed equally the favorite of some beneficent angel, until the contest was nearly over, and the eagle of victory was about descending upon our banners, when an ill-aimed bullet came crushing lengthwise through his foot. His regiment, having lost its brave colonel early on the preceding day, was now under his command. General Rosecrans, knowing the importance of their position, had come near to them, doubting even the bravest of the brave amidst the overwhelming terror of that conflict, and stood himself exposed to the deadly storm of missiles

in order to stimulate the Second Regiment by his presence. Lieutenant-Colonel Mills rode to him and begged him to retire from this danger, that he might be saved for the army, and told him he would stand responsible for the behavior of his veteran regiment. When his lines wavered under the reckless pressure of the enemy, he seized the colors from the guard and held them aloft from his horse, and rallied his thinned and exhausted ranks to renewed deeds of valor. It was then he received his mortal wound. Painful as it was through all that wonderful network which the bullet had crushed in its course, he kept the saddle. His brigadier, General Sweeney, rode up to him, and urged him to retire, with the words so grateful to a soldier, "Colonel, your conduct has been admirable, sir, admirable!" And as the enemy fled before our pursuing battalions, our wounded colonel yielded to his wound and retired. Victory had crowned the Union banners. His undaunted regiment had won new thanks from a brave chief and new laurels from a grateful country. They had inscribed a fresh page of glory in the history of this state. They and their comrades in that fight had furnished a glowing chapter to the future historian of this national war. And in the midst of these glorious results, it pleased God to take to himself our chivalrous soldier. Near the close of his career he said, "I have tried to do my duty; I am not afraid to die." With this language from his general, and from himself—fit memorial words for this monument—let us give him honorable burial, and consecrate his memory in our grateful hearts.

Other such manly, virtuous, gallant lives must yet be sacrificed to ensure the final triumph of our holy cause. Each new sacrifice gives greater sanctity to the national ark of our safety, and invigorates our resolutions. This blood shall not be shed in vain. Holy vengeance crieth to us from the ground. New volunteers replace the fallen. The murderous legions of the conspirators now waver. The gallant Iowa souls that left us at Blue Mills, at Belmont, at Pea Ridge, at Donelson, at Shiloh, at Iuka, at Corinth, speak to us the noblest word of war—**FORWARD!** While we give our tears to the dead, we give our cheers to the living.

"Listen! young heroes, your country is calling.

Time strikes the hour for the brave and the true.

Now, while the foremost are fighting and falling,

Fill up the ranks that have opened for you.

"Never or now! cries the blood of a nation,

Pour'd on the turf where the red rose should bloom.

Now is the day and the hour of salvation.

Never or now! peals the trumpet of doom.

"You whom the fathers made free and defended,

Stain not the scroll that emblazons their fame.

You, whose fair heritage spotless descended,

Leave not your children a birthright of shame!"



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